# Farmer Participation and Engagement in Africa RISING ESA & WA Projects

The International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) leads Africa RISING projects in West Africa and East/Southern Africa (ESA). In West Africa, the project is implemented in Ghana (9 districts, approx. 1,609 farmers) and Mali (3 districts, approx. 8,400 farmers). In East and Southern Africa project activities are being carried out in Tanzania (2 districts, approx. 1,419 farmers) and Malawi (2 districts, approx. 1,296 farmers).

Right from the inception of Africa RISING in West Africa and ESA in October 2011, the focus of the team has always been on engaging farmers as the “focal point” for all research work. Diagnostic studies involving farmers were conducted at the onset to characterize the farming systems as part of the “jumpstart projects” in ESA or “fast track work plan” in West Africa. Concurrently with the implementation of the jumpstart projects, IITA project staff, in collaboration with IFPRI, worked on the selection of future intervention and control sites in Tanzania, Mali and Ghana. In Malawi however, sites were pre-selected by Michigan State University based on their existing action sites.

# Farmer engagement during diagnostic (system understanding) activities

The main purpose of the jumpstart projects was to generate information that would inform the design process of, and/or provide tools for use in the longer-term Africa RISING projects in West Africa and East/Southern Africa[[1]](#footnote-1). The views of farmers therefore influenced the design of the projects from the start.

For example, in West Africa 4,000 men, women and youth from the farming communities targeted for Africa RISING project activities provided their valuable time, local knowledge and ideas for the future in an analysis of 60 communities and their cereal based farming systems in northern Ghana[[2]](#footnote-2). In Mali, activities kicked off with two stakeholder meetings in the priority zone for the Mali FtF program, including farmer organizations and cooperatives. The stakeholders discussed the options for implementation of group activities with the potential for sustainable intensification. Attention was paid to have a balanced male/female attendance. While in East and Southern Africa value chain studies were also conducted for various crops[[3]](#footnote-3) and systems[[4]](#footnote-4) to identify the different actors, their roles and powers.

The following research methods were used when conducting most of the diagnostic studies in Africa RISING ESA and West Africa: focused group discussions; participatory rapid rural appraisals, participatory surveys and value chain studies. The studies main value addition was to ensure that the technologies developed/refined courtesy of the longer-term Africa RISING projects would be based on the needs and realities of the small holder farmers within the project intervention communities. The studies therefore helped the research team to:

* Characterize and select long-term research and control sites,
* Obtain qualitative data for better targeting activities with the farming communities
* Develop well informed community action plans,
* Identify opportunities for introducing improved germplasm,
* Understand the nutritional status of some of the intervention communities,
* Establish multi-stakeholder platforms at district level,
* Identify organizational and institutional issues related to land use and natural resource management (NRM),
* Create an inventory of existing technologies
* Participatory testing of vegetable and cereal varieties with farmers,
* Conduct farmer sensitization on postharvest technologies in some project sites,
* Carry out a synthesis of existing knowledge on factors,
* Analyze the capacity of farmers to practice some of the proposed SI technologies,
* Establish catalogues of seed suppliers and related input suppliers in Tanzania, Malawi and Zambia,

# Selection processes for participating farmers

After identification of the final project sites in Ghana,focus group discussions were conducted with groups of men and women to further analyze the 25 intervention communities in the Northern, Upper East and Upper West regions[[5]](#footnote-5). For each community, production constraints, coping strategies and potential interventions, synergies between crop and livestock production, institutions and linkages between key actors, markets/market niches and networks were identified. Resource maps and seasonal calendars were constructed, and interested farm households and experimental fields selected for each community. Farmer selection was therefore done based on a farmer’s interest to participate and their resources.

Through a nearly similar process in Mali, Africa RISING action villages were visited several times before by research teams in order to plan activities and trials in a participatory manner. In Yorobougoula, Yanfolila District, the R4D platform initiated by ICRAF in 2012 was re-established and activities planned with the platform members. With co-funding from the McKnight Foundation and the CGIAR Research Program (CRP) on Dryland Systems, another research-for-development (R4D) platform was initiated in Nampossela (Koutiala district). Several additional planning meetings were held in Sirakele and Mpessoba (both Koutiala district) to initiate cluster based nutrition field schools with mostly female participants. As a result, the farmer selection process can be surmised as: the R4D animateurs invite farmers (men and women) they think will be able to manage trials well, then the farmers self-select into trial types voluntarily based on their interest. Gender equity was also considered in the process.

The key criterion for farmers taking part in the management of maize leaf necrosis (MLN) disease trials in Tanzania was location within the MLN occurrence hotspots. The research team would then ask willing farmers who had experienced MLN in the previous cropping season whether they were interested in taking part in the trials. For the postharvest technologies research team, lead farmers were selected based on their interest and ability to follow instructions on correct and proper use of the postharvest technologies with minimum supervision.

Other approaches have been used for farmer selection in Tanzania, for example the coupon approach.

In Kongwa/Kiteto, criteria used were location of farmers’ fields near roads for better demonstration effect, willingness of farmers to participate and manage experiments, willingness to share and teach others, open to visitors etc.

# Principles, guidelines and standards that the projects follow while engaging farmers

Guidelines for how scientists working in the projects are to engage with farmers and ensure their participation in project activities is captured in the document - *Engagement standards in participatory research for the Africa RISING Program*.

The guidelines emphasize the importance of engaging community members in all steps of the research process[[6]](#footnote-6). Starting right from how diagnostic studies are conducted, (s)election of research beneficiaries or participants, reporting back of research findings, solution of conflict of interest, selection and prioritization of research areas, offering incentives, selection of research methodology/tools as well as gender mainstreaming.

Some of the key points addressed in the guidelines include:

* Prior to beginning a study researchers must **disclose to all participants the overall objectives of the project and its sponsor**;
* Researchers have to be clear about the **voluntary** nature of participation and seek consent in an open manner. Farmers may reject or withdraw their consent at any time in the course of the research;
* Researchers to always **communicate realistic expectations** and avoid leading community members to have unrealistic expectations at the start of all research activities;
* Researchers are also required to **fully answer all the questions and concerns raised by farmers** during data collection of any kind;
* Respect the fact that farmers have busy schedules too and hence all activities should be **planned in consultation** with the farmers involved;
* How and what considerations researchers should make when/if offering **incentives to farmers and other project partners**;
* Farmers should at all times be engaged in **selecting and prioritization of research areas**;
* Researchers should be cognizant of the **gender dynamics** at play in all the intervention communities in order to avoid enhancing inequalities;
* Researchers take into account the **roles of men and women** and how these may impact on the outcomes of the research;
* Researchers need to be flexible in determining **who represents the community** so as not to miss out on what is important for the community;
* Researchers should **involve community leaders** in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation to further create a sense of ownership and acceptability of the research;
* Select **gender sensitive tools, methodologies and approaches** which will encourage and enhance active participation of men, women and youth and conserve integrity;
* **All data are under the shared ownership** of all program partners including the farming communities;
* **Anonymity** and **confidentiality** of farmers participating in the research has to always be maintained;

# Participation of farmers in different regular and non-regular events

* **Farmer field assessments:** These are farmer led events conducted to get farmers evaluate the technologies being tested. The field assessments allow farmers to select the best-fit technologies based on their own experiences and realities. In this way, technologies identified by farmers as being most promising can be subjected to the uptake and adaptation and process in the following seasons[[7]](#footnote-7).
* **Site specific farmers’ field days (FFD):** The projects have continued to foster field based learning through the farmer field days. The farmers and the researchers working in the different project regions always consult to agree on the date of the FFD as well as how long they will be. While field days by nature are mostly promotional events, they have also been used in the project to expose farmers to the different technology interventions and their potential to increase crop yields. The FFD’s are usually organized along specific theme technologies and end up attracting both male and female farmers from the Africa RISING intervention villages and beyond. Annex 3 provides an overview of the FFD’s organized in Babati District, Tanzania during the period 01 April 2014 – 30 September 2014.
* **Site specific farmers’ field schools (FFS):** The field schools approach has also been used in the two regions as a means of training groups of farmers on good agronomic, crop management and raising fodder practices. For example in 2014 – 2015 season, the FFS model was utilized in 34 communes in Mali (24 communes in Mopti and 10 in Sikasso Regions) to train farmers on integrated Striga and soil fertility management techniques (ISMSF)[[8]](#footnote-8).
* **Research for Development (R4D)/Innovation Platforms (IP):** The platforms have to some extent been used to engage smallholder farmers in the research activities. For example in Babati the R4D platform has supported livestock/small stock initiatives and a direct response on a potato blight problem in Long village and coordinated feedback meetings with farmers and local communities. In each of the R4D and IP platforms inaugurated at the district level in Tanzania, Mali and Ghana; farmers have a representative in the platform management team to contribute to decisions and represent farmers’ interests in the deliberations. However, this is not the case in Malawi where the farmers are part of a existing platform at the Extension Planning Area (EPA) level. The decision regarding which level to establish the platforms was based on the differing realities in the project research sites. Of all the platforms so far established, none is more than 2 years old. It is anticipated that the platforms could play a bigger role in future in terms of influencing the Africa RISING research agenda and engaging the farmers as a means of strengthening the “bottoms up approach” that the projects seek to institutionalize.
* **Meetings to report back research findings to farmers and local communities:** Researchers working in the project usually also ensure that they organize sessions where they report back the results of their findings to the relevant intervention communities.
* **Farmers’ study tours:** The projects have also been organizing study tours for the farmers to visit model farmers in different locations. For example three study tours for exchanging experiences were organized around hybrid seed production fields of sorghum and demonstrations plots located at Faragouaran, Konio, Oure and CAA Samanko in Mali[[9]](#footnote-9).

# Engagement during implantation

Owing to this clear orientation towards farmer engagement from project inception, partners have continued with various approaches in both West Africa and East/Southern Africa to ensure maximum farmer participation and engagement in the project. Some of the approaches used across both regions[[10]](#footnote-10) include:

1. Holding on-farm trials – Nearly all research trials in both West Africa and East/Southern Africa are located on farm and are farmer co-managed (mother trials). Baby trials and scaling plots (Ghana) are completely farmer managed.
2. Household livelihoods approach – Placing people (small-holder farmers) at the center of the research framework
3. Using action and co-learning research models (mother-baby and the community technology parks approaches) through which farmers in the intervention villages and beyond can start to pick up technologies they find most suited to their needs.
4. Community-based participatory research approaches - a partnership approach to research that equitably involves, community members, organizational representatives, and researchers in all aspects of the research process and in which all partners contribute expertise and share decision making and ownership
5. On a case by case basis, offering farmers incentives to facilitate the research process including inputs and cash for inputs
6. Farmer guide the selection and prioritization of research areas (mostly done through the innovation/R4D platforms

# Participation in decision making

It is also important to note that engagement and participation also means that farmers are decision makers when it comes to certain project activities. In the two regions, some of the decisions farmers take the lead on when it comes to the research trials include:

* Deciding which trials to participate in (based on their interest and resources),
* Which crop trial varieties to take part,
* The best planting, harvest or weeding time,
* The ideal dates for holding trainings, and
* How to store the yields from the trial plots.

The engagement of farmers by the project team also leads to farmers getting certain extra benefits including: keeping yields from the trials and access to purchase additional seed of improved varieties.

# Farmers’ contribution to the projects

Farmers involved with the project also in some cases contribute (in kind) to the project. Annex 1 and 2 in the annexes quantify the contributions in terms of time and land by farmers directly involved in Africa RISING trials in the two regions.

# Monitoring and evaluation of farmer engagement and participation

**Annexes**

**Annex 1:** Farmer contribution to Africa RISING ESA

| Research team (where applicable) | Project District | Village/EPA/ Community | No. of farmers | Time put in by each farmer to AR trials | Total land offered by farmers for AR trials (acres) |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Tanzania** | | | | | |
| Post-harvest research team | Babati District | Long Village | 65 | 16 hours per week | - |
| Sabillo Village | 63 | - |
| Seloto Village | 65 | - |
|  | | | | |
| Kongwa & Kiteto Districts | Ndurugumi Village | 40 | 14 hours per week | - |
| Vihingo Village | 37 | - |
| Kiperesa Village | 24 | - |
| Ngipa Village | 19 | - |
|  |  | | | | |
| Crop management efficiency research team | Babati District | Seloto | 4 | 2 hours per week | 4 acres |
| Long | 3 | 3 acres |
| Sabillo | 3 | 3 acres |
| Hallu | 3 | 3 acres |
|  |  | | | | |
| Management of maize leaf necrosis research team | Babati District | Seloto Village | 10 | - | - |
| Matufa Village | 5 | - | - |
| Mara Estate | - | - | - |
|  |  | | | | |
|  | Kongwa & Kiteto Districts | Mlali Village | 348 | 10 hours per week | 160.6 acres |
| Laikala Village | 250 | 225.6 acres |
| Moleti Village | 208 | 148 acres |
| Chitego Village | 133 | 49 acres |
| Njoro Village | 159 | 69 acres |
| **Malawi** | | | | | |
|  | Ntcheu District | Nsipe EPA | 224 | 1 hour per week | 33.2 acres |
|  | Kandeu EPA | 391 | 57.9 acres |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | Dedza District | Linthipe EPA | 445 | 1 hour per week | 67.4 acres |
|  | Golomoti EPA | 236 | 34.9 acres |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |

**Annex 2:** Farmer contribution to Africa RISING WA

| Region | Project District | Village/EPA/ Community | No. of farmers | Time put in by each farmer to AR trials | Total land offered by farmers for AR trials (acres) |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Ghana** | | | | | |
| Northern Region | Salvelugu District | Jana Community | 28 | 9 hours per week | 17.5 acres |
| Duko Community | 58 | 9 hours per week | 33.6 acres |
| Botingli Community | 79 | 11 hours per week | 38.3 acres |
| Kpallung Community | 69 | 11 hours per week | 35.3 acres |
| Tibali Community | 49 | 11 hours per week | 31.8 acres |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| Tolon/Kumbungu District | Chiyohi No. 2 Community | 81 | 11 hours per week | 142 acres |
| Tingoli Community | 67 | 11 hours per week | 35 acres |
| Gbanjong Community | 69 | 11 hours per week | 30.3 acres |
| Tibugunayali Community | 45 | 11 hours per week | 30.6 acres |
| Kprim Community | 50 | 9 hours per week | 31 acres |
| Upper West Region | Nadowli District | Zanko Community | 93 | 9 hours per week | 73 acres |
| Guo Community | 36 | 6 hours per week | 27 acres |
| Siriyiri Community | 30 | 7 hours per week | 23.2 acres |
| Nyagli Community | 33 | 7 hours per week | 28 acres |
| Passe Community | 70 | 8 hours per week | 35 acres |
|  | | | | |
| Wa West District | Goriyili Community | 46 | 9 hours per week | 32.5 acres |
| Gori Community | 45 | 7 hours per week | 31.8 acres |
| Natorduori Community | 48 | 7 hours per week | 29.3 acres |
| Gyilli Community | 36 | 6 hours per week | 29.3 acres |
| Papu Community | 30 | 6 hours per week | 27 acres |
| Upper East Region | Kassena Nankana District | Bonia Community | 136 | 8 hours per week | 76 acres |
| Gia Community | 141 | 7 hours per week | 71 acres |
| Nyangua Community | 50 | 8 hours per week | 73 acres |
| Tekuru Community | 54 | 5 hours per week | 52 acres |
|  | | | | |
| Bongo District | Samboligu Community | 166 | 9 hours per week | 77 acres |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **Mali** | | | | | |
|  | Bougouni District | Flola Community | 110 | 8 hours per week | 89 acres |
| Dieba Community | 120 | 8 hours per week | 56 acres |
| Madina Community | 329 | 8 hours per week | 48 acres |
| Sibrilla Community | 302 | 8 hours per week | 81.5 acres |
|  | | | | |
| Koutiala District | M'Pessoba Community | 3393 | 8 hours per week | 57 acres |
| N'Golonianasso Community | 125 | 8 hours per week | 24 acres |
| Zanzoni Community | 176 | 8 hours per week | 25 acres |
| Sirakele Community | 3636 | 8 hours per week | 21 acres |
| Nampossela Community | 125 | 8 hours per week | 16 acres |
|  | | | | |
| Yanfolila District | Yorobougoula Community | 84 | 10 hours per week | 6 .1 acres |
|  |  | | | | |

**Annex 3:** Overview of participants in farmer field days organized in Babati District between April – September 2014[[11]](#footnote-11)

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Activity** | **Venue** | **Attendance** | | |
| **Men** | **Women** | **Total** |
| Variety x fertiliser x manure | Sabilo | 157 | 58 | 215 |
| Hallu | 112 | 49 | 161 |
| Crop variety and ISFM | Njoro | 187 | 49 | 236 |
| Mlali | 216 | 93 | 309 |
| Laikala | 123 | 104 | 227 |
| Moleti | 137 | 158 | 295 |
| Chitego | 69 | 81 | 150 |
| Vegetable nursery management & GAPs | Seloto, Gallapo, Matufa, Bermi |  |  | 209 |
| Awareness raising: mycotoxins | Babati |  |  | 100 |
| Improved fodder varieties | Babati – 6 villages |  |  | >200 |

1. Africa RISING East and Southern Africa Technical Report 01 April - 30 September 2012 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Sustainable Intensification of Cereal-Based Farming Systems in Ghana’s Guinea Savanna: Constraints and Opportunities Identified with Local Communities [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Enhancing vegetable value chains in rice-based and sole crop production systems in Morogoro, Tanzania [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Value chain analysis of grain legumes in eastern and southern Africa - through research on sustainable intensification [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Africa RISING West Africa Technical Report 01 April - 30 September 2013 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Engagement standards in participatory research for the Africa RISING Program [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Africa RISING East and Southern Africa Technical Report 01 April 2014 – 30 September 2014 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Africa RISING West Africa Technical Report 01 October 2014 – 31 March 2015 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Africa RISING West Africa Technical Report 01 October 2014 – 31 March 2015 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Africa RISING program framework 2012 - 2016 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Africa RISING East and Southern Africa Technical Report 01 April 2014 – 30 September 2014 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)